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THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Trial by fire

The lost planet

Learning to levitate

Does Beethoven compose today?

Could the Nazcans fly?

Isle of the dragon

18



THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

Published weekly by Orbis Publishing Limited
Orbis House, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT

Volume 2 Issue 18

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Cover: Photri; Mary Evans Picture Library (inset); 341: Mary Evans Picture Library (t); artwork by Ed Stuart (b); 342: Royal Observatory, Edinburgh (t and c); Ann Ronan Picture Library (b); 343: Henry Gris (t and b); Institute of Geological Sciences (c); 344-345: Robert Estall; 344: Tony Morrison (t); John Murray Ltd/Nazca by Jim Woodman (b); 345: John Murray Ltd/Nazca by Jim Woodman (t and b); 347: World Government of the Age of Enlightenment (b); 348: Aldus Books/Photos Breton Y Miro; 349: Robert Estall; 350: Guy Lyon Playfair (t); Mary Evans Picture Library (b); 350-351: Guy Lyon Playfair; 351: Mary Evans Picture Library (t and b); CBS Records/Christian Steiner (c); 352: Guy Lyon Playfair (t); Mary Evans Picture Library (l, c and bc); 353: Radio Times (t); Psychic News (c); Mary Evans Picture Library (b); 354: Focal Point (t); British Tourist Authority (b); 355: Robert Estall (t); map by Ed Stuart (c); 356: Sonia Halliday (t); Michael Holford (tr); Aerofilms (bl); Syndication International (br); 357: Mansell Collection (t); Michael Holford (c); 358: Jean-Loup Charmet; 358-359: Mary Evans Picture Library; 360: Rex Features (t); back cover: Sonia Halliday/Jane Taylor

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In next week's issue

The first article of our new **Dragons** series concerns the many myths and legends surrounding the scaly, fire-breathing creature that has haunted folklore for centuries. We question Soviet claims that the planet **Phaeton** exploded to form the asteroids – but unearth a new mystery. In **Nazca**, we examine the significance of the giant animal drawings that cover the desert floor. **Poltergeists** investigates the causes behind the phenomenon. We conclude with an investigation of the extraordinary career of Brazilian 'psychic' healer **José Arigo** who, using the crudest of methods – without anaesthetics or disinfectants – was able to cure the most serious illnesses, even cancer.

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Subscription Rates

For six months (26 issues) £15.00. for one year (52 issues) £30.00. Send your order and remittance to The Unexplained Subscriptions, Punch Subscription Services, Watling Street, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, Bucks MK2 2BW, being sure to state the number of the first issue required.

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U.K. & Eire: Back Nos are obtainable from your newsagent or from The Unexplained Back Nos, Orbis Publishing Ltd, 20/22 Bedfordbury, London WC2N 4BT – 50p each, post free.

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Malta: Binders are obtainable by ordering from your local newsagent price £3.25. In case of difficulty write to The Unexplained Binders, W.H. Smith-Continental Ltd, PO Box 272, 18a Scots Street, Valletta.

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Mystery of the lost planet

Are the asteroids, which circle the Sun between Mars and Jupiter, the remains of a planet that once had intelligent inhabitants? NIGEL HENBEST explores the facts behind this intriguing theory

CIRCLING THE SUN between the orbits of Mars and Jupiter are thousands of broken fragments of rock and metal – the *asteroids*. The largest is Ceres, 620 miles (1000 kilometres) in diameter, roughly one twelfth of the Earth's size and less than a thousandth its weight. The others range down to the size of mere grains of sand.

Ever since the asteroids were discovered, one thought has haunted astronomers: could they be the remains of an exploded world?

The asteroid story starts many years before their discovery. In the year 1766, the German mathematician Johann Titius noticed a certain numerical relationship between the distances of the planets from the Sun. Shortly afterwards his discovery was popularised by the astronomer Johann Bode, and it became known as the Titius-Bode law.

The law goes as follows. Take the series of numbers 0, 3, 6, 12, 24, 48, 96 – where each number (except the first and second) is twice the preceding number. Add 4 to each, and the result is the series 4, 7, 10, 16, 28, 52, 100. Taking the Earth's distance from the Sun as 10 units, this series gives, to a great degree of accuracy, the distances of the planets from the Sun. The planets Mercury and Venus fall at 4 and 7 respectively; Mars is at 16 (very close to the 10 predicted by the Titius-Bode law), Jupiter at 52 and Saturn at 95 (close to the predicted 100).

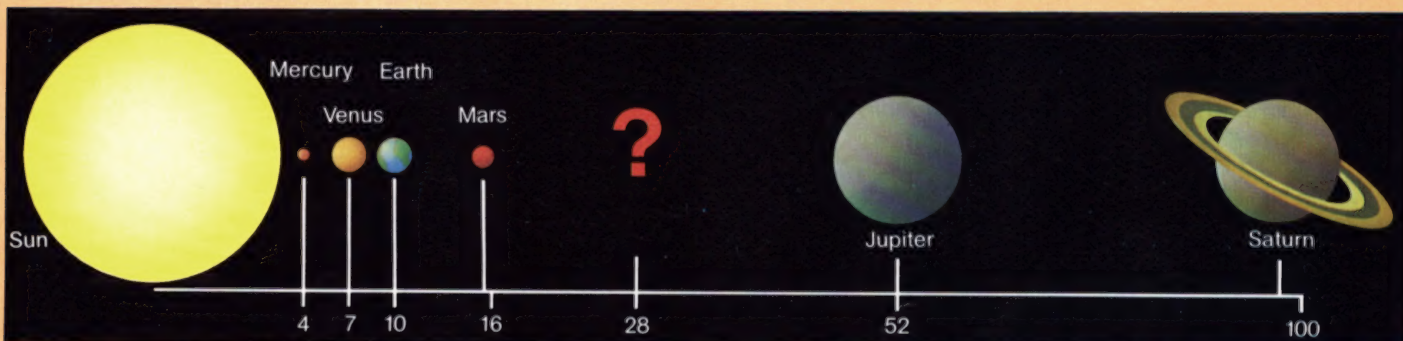
But there is no planet between Mars and Jupiter, at the value 28 predicted by the Titius-Bode law.

In 1800, a group of astronomers met at

Lilienthal in northern Germany and agreed to watch the sky for traces of the missing planet. Each of them agreed to search a certain area, but before this self-styled 'celestial police' had managed to track down its subject, it was announced that the Sicilian astronomer Giuseppe Piazzi had discovered it by accident, on 1 January 1801. Piazzi named the new 'planet' Ceres; it was far smaller than any other planet, so tiny that it was invisible to the naked eye. Its motion through the heavens from night to night was the only thing that revealed it was not a star, and showed that Ceres's orbit was indeed that of the predicted planet. It began to

Above: the fall of Phaeton. Greek legend tells that Phaeton, son of the Sun-god, drove his father's chariot so recklessly that the gods were forced to kill him

Below: the distances of the planets from the Sun are given approximately by the mathematical sequence 4, 7, 10, 16, 28, 52, 100. But what puzzled astronomers of the 18th century was that there was no planet at 28



Phaeton

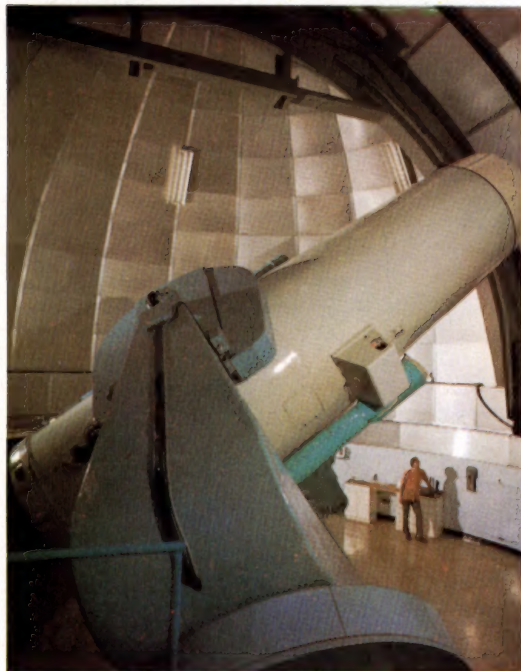
seem as if the mystery had been solved.

A year later a founder member of the celestial police was attempting to relocate Ceres when he stumbled on another point of light, a second tiny planet orbiting the Sun between Mars and Jupiter. The discoverer, Heinrich Olbers, named the new body Pallas. He at once concluded that there could be only one reason why the solar system has two small bodies where Titius and Bode had predicted a planet: the planet had once existed, but had at some time in the past exploded into fragments.

The celestial police took to the beat once more. Within five years they found another two asteroids – the name, meaning ‘starlike’, given them by the great British astronomer William Herschel (1738–1822) because they appear only as points of light. Almost 40 years elapsed before a fifth asteroid was found; but when, at the close of the last century, astronomers began to photograph the sky, they immediately started picking up dozens of asteroids. Their technique was to use very long exposures; the asteroids then



Above: this photograph, taken with a very long exposure time, shows stars as point sources and asteroids as trails. Since the turn of the century, this technique has enabled astronomers to identify hundreds of new asteroids. The photograph was taken by the UK Schmidt telescope (left) at Siding Spring Mountain in Australia



Below: Heinrich Olbers (1758–1840), who discovered the second asteroid in 1801 and named it Ceres. He immediately concluded that a planet had once orbited the Sun between Mars and Jupiter and had been destroyed in a vast explosion

showed up as blurs, moving in their orbits, while the fixed stars were recorded as point sources of light.

Today the orbits of over 2000 asteroids are known; and astronomers estimate that there must be at least 100,000 altogether in the region of space between Mars and Jupiter that is known as the asteroid belt.

It is true that, as Heinrich Olbers predicted, astronomers have found countless fragments of rubble where the Titius-Bode law suggests there should be a planet. But was his theory correct? Are the asteroids the remains of an exploded planet? Controversy on this point raged throughout the 19th century. Rather than believe the asteroids are merely the unused building blocks of a planet

that never formed, many astronomers argued that they must be the remains of an Earth-like world that had been overtaken by a catastrophe of immense proportions. Some thought this planet had collided with a satellite of Jupiter, or that a comet had crashed into it; others surmised that the gravitation of massive Jupiter had simply torn the planet apart.

But the theories that had the greatest appeal at the time involved the planet being blown apart by internal forces. Perhaps its ocean waters had seeped down to the red-hot core and exploded into steam to carry the planet into oblivion, rather like the volcano Krakatoa, which was destroyed in 1883 by sea water boiling violently when it percolated down to the roots of the fiery mountain. Or perhaps volcanic forces had built up under an unyielding crust that allowed no escape valves – volcanoes – until the pressure burst the planet apart at its seams.

Recent reports suggest that the exploded planet theory is enjoying a renewed popularity in the Soviet Union. Soviet academician Sergei Orloff has named the missing planet Phaeton, after the son of the Greek Sun-god who, legend tells, drove his father's chariot so recklessly that he scorched the Earth – and the gods, to save our world, destroyed Phaeton himself.

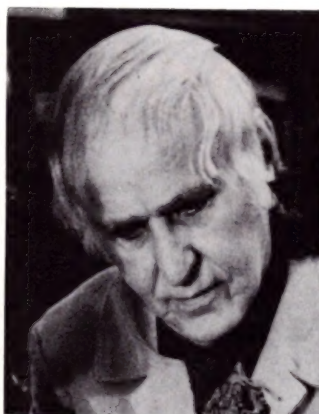
Professor Aleksander Zavaritsky has theoretically reconstructed the planet Phaeton, using as his basis meteorites that have fallen in the Soviet Union. These were undoubtedly, he concluded, small fragments of an Earth-like planet that had a molten iron core, a rocky interior, and a surface of mountains and oceans surrounded by an atmosphere. These would have been ideal conditions for the development of life – could it be that a civilisation, more advanced than



the Earth's, somehow destroyed itself and its planet less than a million years ago?

Zavaritsky died in 1963, but his ideas live on. Among those who have taken them up is science-fiction writer Aleksandr Kazantsev, well known for his revolutionary ideas about space and astronomy. According to Kazantsev, the Earth was visited in prehistoric times by alien spacemen who appeared in ancient myths as gods descending from the Heavens. These, he says, were astronauts from Phaeton who happened to be travelling through the solar system when their planet exploded. With no home to return to, they landed on Earth. Here they survived for several generations – and as, according to Kazantsev, a Phaeton-humanoid lived for a thousand years, they 'bridged the gap from primitive to thinking man, to perhaps help him, educate him and leave him with the legends of gods coming down from the skies aboard fiery chariots.'

These benevolent aliens are no longer found on Earth today because – conveniently enough for Kazantsev's theory – they all



Above: Aleksandr Kazantsev, a Soviet science-fiction writer and exponent of the Phaeton theory

Below: a group of tektite meteorites. Soviet scientists argue that some tektites originated on Phaeton



happened to perish a couple of thousand years ago. Kazantsev leaves open the question of why they should have suddenly died off so recently, after having survived on Earth for almost a million years.

Kazantsev's friend Professor Felix Zigel supports his theory. A convinced believer in Phaeton, he has calculated that a collision with another astronomical body, or a purely volcanic explosion, would not have left the asteroids in the near-circular orbits that they follow today.

The only possibility is a massive thermonuclear catastrophe, in which all the oceans erupted as a massive hydrogen bomb and cracked open the crust. Apparently supposing that it is the crust – and not the gravitational field – that holds a planet together, Professor Zigel adds 'with its shell destroyed, the planet went on disintegrating



Above: Professor Felix Zigel, who supports Kazantsev's theory of the origins of the asteroid belt

until nothing but rubble remained.'

Only man-like humanoids, argue Kazantsev and Zigel, could have triggered such a catastrophe, for it could only have come about as the result of an accidental explosion of nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, following the ideas of Zavaritsky, Zigel deduces what he can from the meteorites that fall to earth. Western astronomers know of iron-nickel metallic meteorites, and of stony meteorites made of igneous rocks.

But Zigel's Russian meteorites are different. They include pumice stone, produced by volcanoes, and even limestone meteorites – and limestone is a sedimentary rock formed by the fossilised shells of microscopic animals deposited on the sea bed. Although such meteorites have never fallen anywhere else in the world, Zigel maintains that they are actually fragments of the surface of ocean beds of Phaeton.

According to Zigel, the case is really clinched by some unusual glassy meteorites called tektites. Tektites are found at many places on the Earth, lying over the Australian desert and on ocean floors. They played a dramatic role in the Phaeton saga when the first Russian tektites were found near the Caspian Sea in 1975.

Zigel points out that 'glass-like slag' is found after nuclear tests on Earth. What more evidence could we need that a huge nuclear explosion took place within our solar system – and where else could it have been but on Phaeton?

He quotes figures to match. Zigel estimates that the tektites must have formed after nuclear reactions at a temperature of 100 million degrees – far hotter than the centre of the Sun. He dismisses more conventional ideas that tektites result from ordinary meteorites hitting the Earth, arguing that 'we now know that at no time has the temperature at impact of a meteorite exceeded 200,000°C.' Extraordinarily enough, he also claims that he has himself tried to create tektites at this temperature – a temperature 30 times higher than that at the Sun's surface! 'The resulting tektites are completely different from those occurring naturally.'

Kazantsev and Zigel are convinced that their evidence is conclusive. Earth's planet Phaeton once orbited the Sun beyond Mars; its civilisation, more advanced than ours, invented thermonuclear weapons a million years ago. Misuse of nuclear power led to the destruction of the planet Phaeton, left now as mute rocky debris in the asteroid belt. Whatever anthropologists may say, Kazantsev and Zigel insist that it was survivors from the catastrophe that befell Phaeton, astronauts stranded in space, who descended to Earth as gods and led Man on his rise to civilisation.

What do Western scientists think of the Phaeton theory? See page 366

Aeronauts not astronauts?

Did the ancient Nazcans know the secret of flight?
TONY MORRISON continues this series on the Nazca mystery by describing a modern experiment that shows how they could have taken to the air

WHILE MARIA REICHE was wandering across the Nazca desert, measuring and tabulating the mysterious lines, Erich von Däniken, a former Swiss hotelier, was writing a best-seller. Ironically it was not Maria Reiche's devotion but von Däniken's *Chariots of the gods?* that made the Nazca lines world famous overnight.

Von Däniken, like many other tourists who visit the lines, was astonished by their sheer scale. The gigantic 'drawings' of animals and the long, perfectly straight lines cover almost every level space on the desert plateau for several hundred square miles around Nazca in Peru. Even more intriguing is the fact that these shapes can only be appreciated fully by flying over them, which suggests that the designs were *intended* to be seen from the sky.

Von Däniken said that his 'clear-cut impression' of the Nazca desert was that it resembled an airfield. Several years after the publication of *Chariots of the gods?* – when it

Above: an aerial view of the Pampa San José, showing a clearing and converging lines – now criss-crossed with tourists' car tracks

Right: Jim Woodman and Julian Nott, who, in 1975, set out to prove that the ancient Nazcans could have flown over the desert using primitive hot-air balloons

had already sold several million copies – its author expanded this view on BBC-TV's *Horizon* programme. He suggested that the natives of ancient Nazca had perhaps witnessed the landing of a space vehicle. Later they scratched elaborate lines on the surface of the desert to tell the gods (in von Däniken's words) 'land here – everything is prepared for you'.

The television programme set out to demonstrate that no normal wheeled vehicles, let alone spacecraft, could move safely on the fragile desert surface; the wheels, the commentator explained, would dig into the soft earth. Maria Reiche agreed, saying: 'The spacemen would have gotten stuck.'

However, the desert at Nazca is covered not only with the lines but with the tracks of many cars, and there is photographic evidence that at least one light aircraft has touched down safely on one of the so-called 'landing strips' of the Pampa de San José.

But the most perceptive argument against the 'landing ground' hypothesis came from American astronomer Carl Sagan, who remarked – also on BBC-TV – that such thinking was 'a kind of temporal chauvinism'. In other words, why would travellers advanced enough to cross hundreds of light years of interstellar space *need* airfields?

But other, less dubious, theories for the Nazca mystery are still short on proof. One ingenious attempt to explain the purpose of the lines and the way they were drawn came from American businessman Jim Woodman, founder of Air Florida. Woodman, who has been given awards by several Latin American governments for tourist promotion, enlisted the support of ENTURPERU (the Peruvian Tourist Corporation), and the British ace balloonist Julian Nott.

Woodman, like many others who had flown over the lines, was fascinated by the fact that they can only be fully understood from the air. Together with Julian Nott and a group from the Miami-based International Explorers Society, Woodman set out to show that the ancient Nazcans could have flown – using primitive hot air balloons. Only in that way, he argued, could the Nazcans have designed and appreciated their lines.

Although the ancient flight hypothesis has





Left: Woodman and Nott sit precariously on the reed gondola of *Condor 1*. They took its design from what appeared to be a balloon and gondola drawn on ancient Nazcan pots

Below: *Condor 1* soars in triumph over the desert in November 1975, shedding its ballast to gain greater height

never been recognised by the world's foremost archaeologists, Woodman proved his point. Using only local materials he built an efficient hot air balloon called *Condor 1*. He gathered samples of cloth from Nazcan graves to show that the 1500-year-old fabric was woven closely enough to have been used for balloon construction.

The search for large pieces of cloth – such as may have been used for ballooning – proved unsuccessful, so the fabric for *Condor 1* had to be modern – matching the ancient weave as closely as possible. The result was cloth that was heavy and dangerously porous – however, when ‘smoked’, particles from the wood-burning fire clogged the pores, making the fabric perfectly serviceable.

The Nazcans would have needed fires to inflate and launch the balloons: Woodman found piles of stones dumped at the ends of some of the lines or in the large cleared spaces that had, he insists, been subjected to intense heat. The heaps had central depressions like shallow pits – these became known to Woodman's team as ‘burning pits’. Mike DeBakey, an associate of the *Condor* project, considered the ‘runways’ as ceremonial areas and the hypothetical fires probably part of the rituals.

In November 1975 the balloon rose dramatically from the desert, bearing aloft Woodman and Nott seated astride a reed-built gondola. The inspiration for the design of the gondola came from drawings on pottery sherds found by Jim Woodman, drawings of – apparently – a globe and what Woodman takes to be an indication of a stylised gondola.

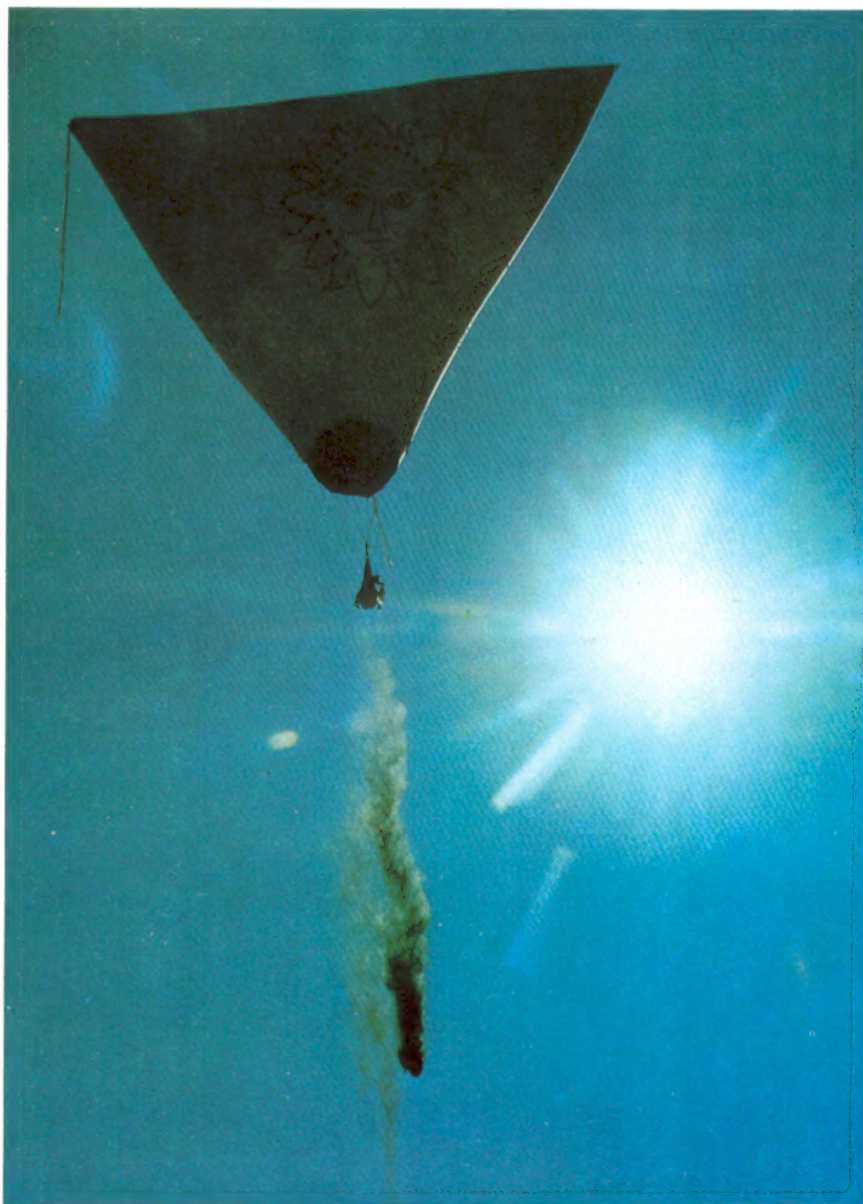
Assuming that Jim Woodman's theory about early Nazcan flight is correct then the implications are revolutionary – not just for Nazca, but for the history of aviation. Already the established record for Man's first

flight is being contested. Woodman also points out that there is documentary evidence for a hot air balloon being demonstrated by one Lourenço de Gusmao, a Brazilian Jesuit, in 1709 – or threequarters of a century before the Montgolfier brothers' famous flight on 4 June 1783 at Annonay in France.

Woodman's ‘archaeology by experiment’ may give some support to the theory that the Nazcans could fly, but the suggestion is still hotly refuted by academics. Yet the fact remains that the lines are virtually invisible, and almost totally meaningless from the ground.

When *Condor 1* took off and sailed spectacularly over the Nazcan desert – for all its courage and drama – it proved nothing except that the Nazcans could have flown. It did nothing to explain the why and how of the great drawings on the desert.

There are no monkeys in Peru – why is one drawn on the Nazca desert? See page 370



The art of levitation

It is claimed that many ancient peoples knew the secrets of levitation. But it is not, apparently, a lost art: some people today claim to be able to attain weightlessness at will. LYNN PICKNETT investigates

A UNIQUE SERIES of photographs appeared in the magazine *Illustrated London News* on 6 June 1936. They showed the successive stages in the levitation of an Indian yogi, Subbayah Pullavar – thus proving that, whatever else it was, this phenomenon was not a hypnotic illusion.

A European witness of the event, P. Y. Plunkett, sets the scene:

The time was about 12.30 p.m. and the sun directly above us so that shadows played no part in the performance. . . . Standing quietly by was Subbayah Pullavar, the performer, with long hair, a drooping moustache and a wild look in his eye. He salaamed to us and stood chatting for a while. He had been practising this particular branch of yoga for nearly 20 years (as had past generations of his family) We asked permission to take photographs of the performance and he gave it willingly. . . .

Plunkett gathered together about 150 witnesses while the performer began his ritual preparations. Water was poured around the tent in which the act of levitation was to take place; leather-soled shoes were banned inside the circle, and the performer entered

Photographs taken of a levitation performance carried out by an Indian yogi, Subbayah Pullavar, before a large number of witnesses. The photographs were taken by the Englishman P. Y. Plunkett and a friend, and published in the *Illustrated London News* of 6 June 1936. The first photograph (below) shows the yogi before levitation, lying inside a tent. He is grasping a cloth-wrapped stick, which he continues to hold throughout the performance. The tent is then closed (right) for some minutes during the mysterious act of levitation itself

the tent alone. Some minutes later helpers removed the tent and there, inside the circle, was the fakir, floating on the air.

Plunkett and another witness came forward to investigate: the fakir was suspended in the air about a yard from the ground. Although he held on to a cloth-covered stick, this seemed to be for purposes of balance only – not for support. Plunkett and his friend examined the space around and under Subbayah Pullavar, and found it innocent of any strings or other 'invisible' apparatus. The yogi was in a trance and many witnesses believed that he had indisputably levitated,



As the levitation performance continues, the curtains of the tent are drawn back and the yogi appears, floating in mid-air (top). Plunkett and his friend examined the space beneath and around the yogi, but were unable to find any evidence of strings or other supporting apparatus. Although some sceptics have claimed that the yogi was, in fact, not levitating but merely in a cataleptic trance, the relaxed position of the hand on the post suggests that the body of the yogi was indeed very nearly weightless during the performance. After levitation (above right) the yogi's body was so stiff that five men could not bend his limbs



Right: the Transcendental Meditation movement claims that this photograph shows students levitating. It is alleged that, under the supervision of tutors, the students achieve weightlessness through meditation



although it has been suggested that he had, in fact, merely passed into a cataleptic trance. The famous photographs were taken from various angles during the four minutes of the performance, and then the tent was re-erected around the fakir. Evidently the 'descent' was something very private, but Plunkett managed to witness it through the thin tent walls:

After about a minute he appeared to sway and then very slowly began to descend, still in a horizontal position. He took about five minutes to move from the top of the stick to the ground, a distance of about three feet. [1 metre] . . . When Subbayah was back on the ground his assistants carried him over to where we were sitting and asked if we would try to bend his limbs. Even with assistance we were unable to do so. The yogi was rubbed and splashed with cold water for a further five minutes before he came out of his trance and regained full use of his limbs.

The swaying motion and horizontal position that Plunkett witnessed seem to be essential to true levitation. Students of transcendental meditation (TM) are taught, under the supervision of the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi at his headquarters in Switzerland, to levitate. One student described this 'impossible' achievement:

People would rock gently, then more and more, and then start lifting off in to the air. You should really be in a lotus position to do it – you can hurt yourself landing if you've got a dangling undercarriage. To begin with it's like the Wright brothers' first flight – you come down with a bump. That's why we have to sit on foam rubber cushions. Then you learn to control it better, and it becomes totally exhilarating.

So can *anyone* induce levitation? The TM



dowser's rod, intervenes to achieve the miracle of nullifying the force of gravity.

It seems that religious fervour may have something to do with the phenomenon; there are many reports of levitation by both Christian and Buddhist monks. In 1902 Aleister Crowley met his compatriot Alan Bennett, who had become a Buddhist monk at his monastery in Burma in 1902; he, too, had become so weightless that he was 'blown about like a leaf'.

Alexandra David-Neel, the French explorer of the early 20th century, describes witnessing an extraordinary kind of long-distance running by a Tibetan lama: 'The man did not run. He seemed to lift himself from the ground proceeding by leaps. It looked as if he had been endowed with the elasticity of a ball and rebounded each time his feet touched the ground. His steps had the regularity of a pendulum.' The lama is said to have run hundreds of miles using this strange form of locomotion, keeping his eyes fixed on some far-distant goal.

The famous Russian ballet dancer Nijinsky, too, had the extraordinary ability of appearing to be almost weightless. He would jump up high and fall as lightly – and slowly – as a thistledown in what was known as the 'slow vault'.

Like many inexplicable phenomena, levitation seems to be singularly useless. The distance covered is rarely more than a few

students believe they can, after a stringent mental training; the disciplines, both spiritual and physical, of the yogis seem to prepare them to defy gravity. It is fairly easy to induce a state of semi-weightlessness, as this account of a fat publican – a perfectly ordinary person – being raised in the air as a party trick shows.

The fat man sat on a chair and four people, including his small daughter, demonstrated the impossibility of lifting him with their index fingers only, placed in his armpits and the crooks of his knees. They then removed their fingers and put their hands in a pile on top of his head, taking care to interleave their hands so that no one person's two hands were touching. The four concentrated deeply for about 15 seconds; then someone gave a signal, and quickly they replaced their fingers in armpits and knees – and the fat publican floated into the air.

Sceptics might point to the intervention of non-spiritual spirits, bearing in mind the location of the event, but the phenomenon has been witnessed hundreds of times in pubs, homes, and school-yards. If it works – and one must assume it does – then how is it possible?

The sudden burst of concentration of four people with a single, 'impossible' target could, some people believe, unlock the hidden magic of the human will. Or it has been suggested that a little-known natural force, perhaps the same one that guides the





Left: an aerial view of the white horse at Uffington in Oxfordshire. The terrain on which it is carved is so hilly that its true shape can only really be appreciated from the air – a fact that has led some to speculate that the people who carved it were able to levitate and inspect their work from above

Opposite page: Uri Geller and some friends conduct a levitation session with Colin Wilson as subject. First (top) the experimenters place their hands on top of the subject's head, in such a way that no one person's two hands are touching. Then, on a command from Geller, they remove their hands from the subject's head and place their index fingers under his arms and knees. The subject immediately rises into the air (bottom)

feet or, at the most, the height of a room – useful only for dusting or decorating the home. But some people believe that the ancients could levitate quite easily, and did so to design certain enormous earthworks that can be appreciated only from the air, such as some of the white horses of the chalk downland in England and the desert patterns in Peru.

The limitations of modern levitation need not have applied to the ancients – perhaps they had developed the art to a high degree and could soar into the sky at will. Like other psychic faculties, it appears that levitation is an art, once almost lost, that is now being re-learned by determined students. Perhaps one day, modern levitators will be able to 'fly' as the ancient Druids supposedly could.

The reported 'flights' of the ancients suggest to some researchers that they were out-of-the-body-experiences (see pages 108 and 144) or astral travel, rather than flesh-and-blood transportation. Certainly, many accounts of levitation or flying read like lucid dreams – and dreams of flying are very common experiences. Some dreamers wake up convinced they *can* fly; fortunately, the sights and sounds of the real world generally bring them to their senses before they can experiment.

With a few exceptions, it seems that one can levitate only after long periods of training and discipline: in this way, the body is mysteriously 'given permission' to defy the

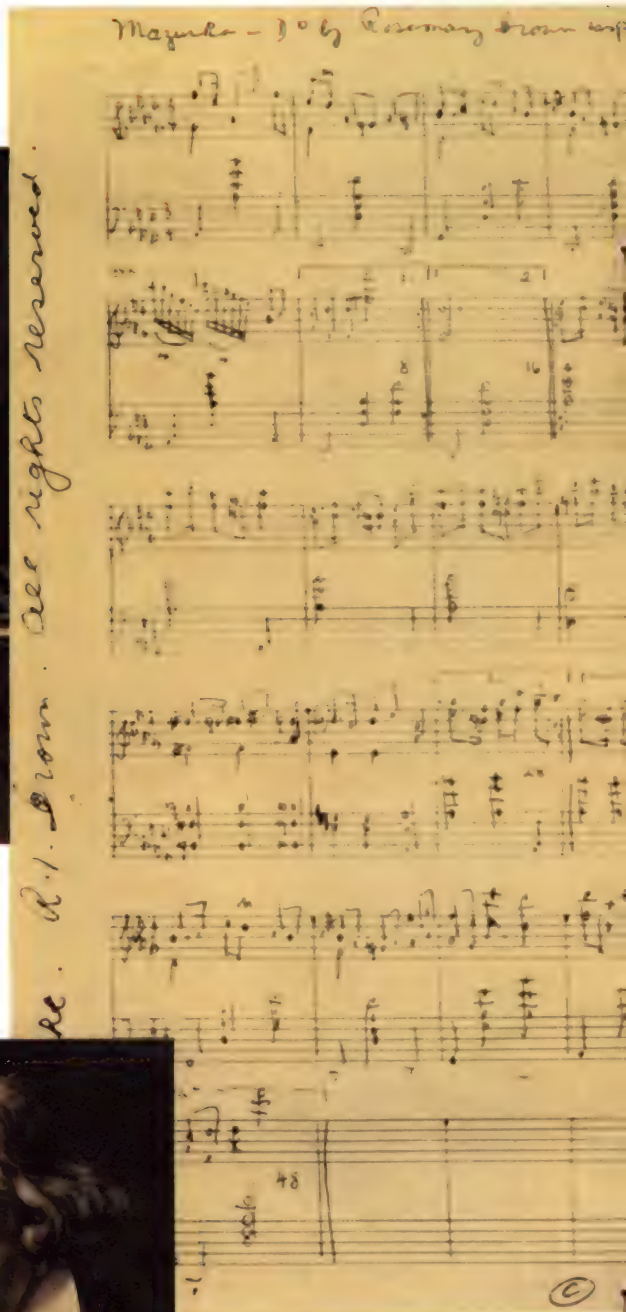
law of gravity. Perhaps there is a law of levitation with a secret formula – an 'Open, Sesame' – which the initiate uses before rising off the ground.

This theory would explain the unusual cases of spontaneous or random levitation that fascinated Charles Fort. One such case was 12-year-old Henry Jones from Shepton Mallet who, during the year 1657, was observed on several occasions to rise into the air. Once he was able to put his hands flat against the ceiling, and on another occasion he took off and sailed 30 yards (27 metres) over the garden wall. The phenomenon lasted only a year – but this was long enough for the rumour to spread that he was 'bewitched'.

Certainly levitation is a rare phenomenon, but when considered with other accounts of equally rare and bizarre human attributes, such as incombustibility, elongation and superhuman strength, it must be taken seriously. Mothers who lift cars off their trapped children, firewalkers (see page 330) and the sleepwalkers who perform 'impossible' feats pose profound questions about the nature of Man's physical and psychical potential. Perhaps we are intended to be able to defy gravity at will. Until we understand the nature of the phenomenon it must remain one of Man's mysterious hidden powers.

Was Daniel Dunglas Home's most famous levitation genuine? See page 396

The latest works of Beethoven, Brahms and Liszt

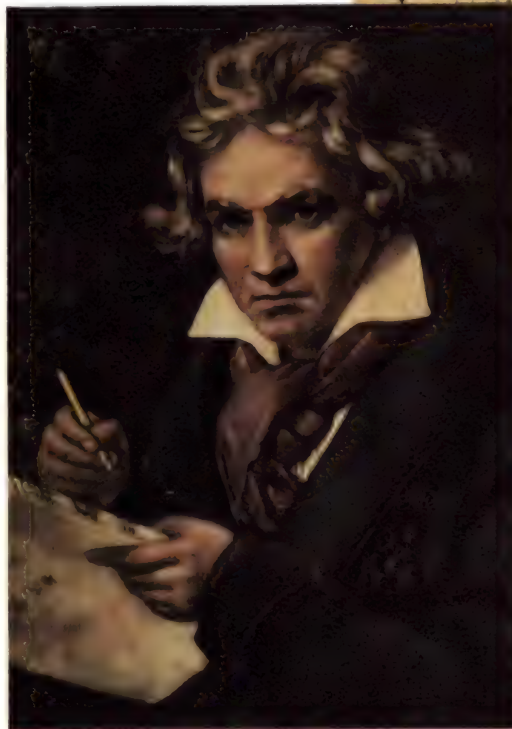


Many sensitives claim to receive works of art from long-dead artists – composers, authors, painters. But, asks LYNN PICKNETT, are these works truly from beyond the grave, or do they come from the subconscious mind?

BEETHOVEN IS STILL WORKING on his 10th Symphony. This extraordinary concept – that musicians and other creative beings can still produce works of art years, even centuries, after their death – is as natural as breathing to many spiritualists and psychics.

The best known of the mediums who claim to be amanuenses for long-dead composers is London housewife Rosemary Brown, who acts almost as an agent for Liszt, Beethoven, Brahms, Debussy, Chopin, Schubert and, more recently, Stravinsky. She is an unassuming, middle-aged lady with only a rudimentary musical background and she is the first to acknowledge that the works 'dictated' to her are beyond her everyday musical capacity. Mrs Brown sees herself merely as the humble scribe and friend of the late composers – the ultimate polish must come from the professionals in performance.

The idea of survival beyond death is not, however, strange to this Balham housewife. As a young girl she had visions of an elderly man who told her repeatedly that he and other great composers would befriend her and teach her their wonderful music. It



Above left: Rosemary Brown being filmed by an American television company in October 1980. During the filming Rosemary 'wrote' *Mazurka in D flat* (above), which she claims was inspired by Chopin (above right)

Left: Beethoven contacted Rosemary Brown in 1964; he told her he was no longer deaf and could once again enjoy listening to music



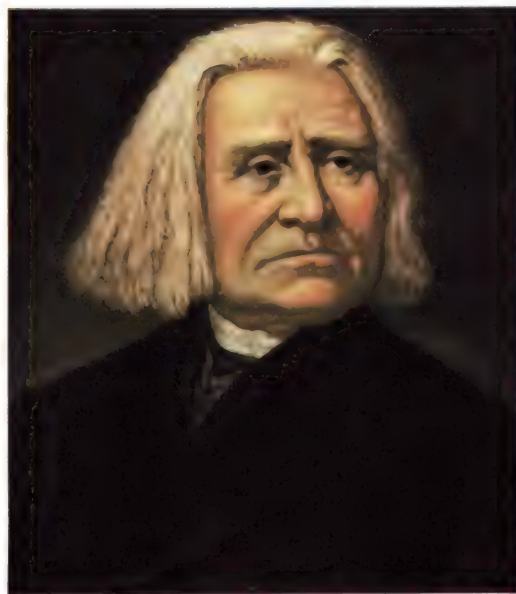
Below right: American composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein. Rosemary Brown sought an interview with Bernstein on the advice of her 'spirits'. He was most impressed with the music Rosemary showed him

was only many years later, when she was a widow concerned mainly with the struggle of bringing up two children on very limited means, that she saw a picture of Franz Liszt (1811–1886) and recognised him as her ghostly friend.

In 1964 she was contacted by other great composers – including Beethoven and Chopin – and her life work began in earnest: taking down their 'unfinished symphonies' and sharing her belief that there is no death – the great musicians are still producing.

The pieces transmitted to her are no mere outlines: they are full compositions, mainly for the piano but some for full orchestras. Mrs Brown says the music is already composed when it is communicated to her: the musicians simply dictate it as fast as she can write it down.

Indeed, observers of the process are amazed at the speed with which Rosemary Brown writes the music – and the standard is



Right: Franz Liszt, who first appeared to Rosemary Brown when she was a young girl. He told her that, when she grew up, he and other composers would contact her and teach her their music

far beyond her conscious capacity or even her conscious knowledge. During the writing sessions Mrs Brown chats familiarly with her unseen guests, so sincerely and normally that it is difficult to be embarrassed, despite the bizarre circumstances. Pen poised over the music sheets, she listens. 'I see . . .', she says to Franz Liszt, 'these two bars go here . . . no, I see, I'm sorry. No, you're going too fast for me. If you could just repeat . . .' With pauses for checking and some conversation with the composer, she writes down the work far faster than most musicians could possibly compose.

Sometimes communications are interrupted as she gently chides Liszt for becoming so excited that he speaks volubly in German or French. Chopin occasionally forgets himself and speaks to her in his native Polish – which she writes down phonetically and has translated by a Polish friend.

So are these posthumous works recognisably those of Liszt, Chopin, Beethoven,



Brahms? Concert pianist Hephzibah Menuhin said 'I look at these manuscripts with immense respect. Each piece is distinctly in the composer's style.' Leonard Bernstein and his wife entertained Mrs Brown in their London hotel suite and were very impressed both by her sincerity and by the music she took to them purportedly from the long-dead composers. British composer Richard Rodney Bennett said: 'A lot of people can improvise, but you couldn't fake music like this without years of training. I couldn't have faked some of the Beethoven myself.'

Since that memorable breakthrough in 1964 Mrs Brown has also, she says, been contacted by dead artists, poets, playwrights, philosophers and scientists. Vincent van Gogh (1853–1890) has communicated his current works through her; at first in charcoal ('because that's all I had') and then in

Psychic art

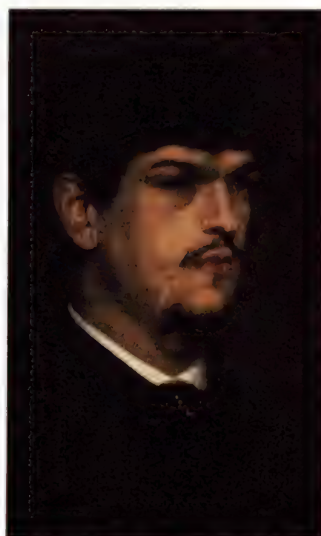
oils. Debussy has chosen to paint through Mrs Brown, rather than compose because his artistic interests have changed since he has 'passed over'.

Bertrand Russell, philosopher, has had to reconsider his atheism and disbelief in a life after death, for, as Rosemary Brown points out, he is very much 'alive' these days and wants to pass on the message of hope in eternal life. Albert Einstein also communicates, patiently explaining any difficult jargon or concepts, reinforcing the belief in further planes of existence.

Sceptics point out that the music alleged to come from the minds of the great composers is less than their best, being often reminiscent of their earliest, rather than their mature, works. This, says Mrs Brown, is not the point. Her first introduction to Franz Liszt was 'more than a musical breakthrough.' The late Sir Donald Tovey is believed to have explained the motivation behind the communications in this posthumous statement:

In communicating through music and conversation, an organized group of musicians, who have departed from

Rosemary Brown's contacts are not confined to the field of music: Van Gogh inspired this drawing (right) in 1975, and Debussy (below), now more interested in visual art, also paints 'through' her. She was contacted by Albert Einstein (bottom) in 1967, and by Bertrand Russell (below left) in 1973



your world, are attempting to establish a precept for humanity, i.e., that physical death is a transition from one state of consciousness to another wherein one retains one's individuality . . . We are not transmitting music to Rosemary Brown simply for the sake of offering possible pleasure in listening thereto; it is the implications relevant to this phenomenon which we hope will stimulate sensible and sensitive interest and stir many who are intelligent and impartial to consider and explore the unknown of man's mind and psyche. When man has plumbed the mysterious depths of his veiled consciousness, he will then be able to soar to correspondingly greater heights.

Mrs Brown has many friends and admirers outside the spiritualist circle, notably among distinguished musicians, writers and broadcasters. Whatever the source of her mysterious music, this modest and religious lady inspires respect and affection, so obvious is her sincerity.

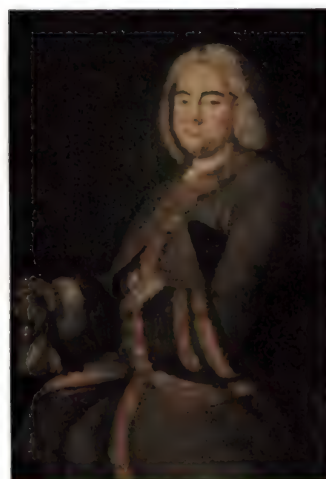
She is, however, not unique in her musical communications. The British concert pianist, John Lill, also claims an other-worldly inspiration for his playing. This winner of the prestigious Tchaikovsky Piano Competition had a tough beginning, playing the piano in pubs in London's East End. As he says 'I don't go around like a crazed fellow with my head in the air . . . [I'm] neither a nutter nor some quaint loony falling around in a state of trance.' But, as he added thoughtfully, 'because something is rare it doesn't mean that it doesn't exist.'

The 'something' began for him when he was practising in the Moscow Conservatoire

Right: concert pianist John Lill is convinced that he has had spiritual help in his career. He believes that Beethoven watched him practising for the Tchaikovsky Piano Competition in Moscow, and has since held several conversations with him. And Beethoven has dedicated a piece of his own music to him – the *Sonata in E Minor* communicated to Rosemary Brown in 1972



Below: Clifford Enticknap, who has written an oratorio entitled *Beyond the veil* 'under the inspiration' of G. F. Handel (bottom)



for the Tchaikovsky Piano Competition. He became aware of a figure watching him – someone wearing unusual clothes. He believes he was being observed by Beethoven, who has since held many conversations with him. However John Lill does not consider himself a special case. This sort of direct inspiration, he says, is available to everyone who achieves a certain frame of mind:

'It is very difficult to conceive inspiration unless it is something you receive. I don't see it as something from within a person. When I go on stage I close my mind to what I have learnt and open it fully in the expectation that inspiration will be received.'

But sometimes it is difficult to achieve this state of mind 'if it's a particularly muggy day, or the acoustics are dry. Even the attitude of the audience makes a difference. A quiet mind is essential.'

Inspiration, says Lill, is an infinite thing: 'music begins where words leave off – where music leaves off the "force" begins'.

The composer of, among other magnificent works, the *Messiah* is still 'writing' grand oratorios through his medium Clifford Enticknap, an Englishman who has always been obsessed with Handel and Handelian music. Handel taught him music in another incarnation, says Enticknap, and their relationship as master and pupil dates back to the time of Atlantis where Handel was a great teacher known as Joseph Arkos. Yet before that the soul we know as Handel lived on Jupiter, the planet of music, together with all the souls we know as the great musicians (and some we may never know for they will not be incarnated on Earth).

In his personality as 'the master Handel', the musician communicated to Enticknap a

four-and-a-half-hour long oratorio entitled *Beyond the veil*; a 73-minute excerpt of this has been recorded by the London Symphony Orchestra and the Handelian Foundation Choir and is available on tape through the Handelian Foundation as 'proof' of Handel's survival beyond death.

In BBC-TV's programme *Spirits from the past*, shown on 12 August 1980, snatches from the oratorio were played over scenes of Mr Enticknap playing the organ in Handel's favourite English church. Television critics found little fault with the music – which did indeed sound to the untutored ear to be very similar to Handel's more familiar works – but the words provoked widespread ridicule. One critic compared them with the unfortunate poetry of William McGonagall (1805–1902) whose poetic sincerity was matched only by his total lack of talent and sheer genius in juxtaposing the risible with the pathetic. (Another critic went so far as to exclaim: 'Fame at last for McGonagall – he's teamed up with Handel beyond the veil!')

However, mediums warn against judging spirit communications in a state of flippant scepticism. As John Lill says of the difficulties the spirits have in 'getting through': 'It's all to do with cleaning a window, and some windows are cleaner than others.'

If, as many serious researchers into the paranormal have believed, the music does not in fact come from the minds of deceased musicians, then where does it come from? Certainly not from the conscious mind of Mrs Brown, who obviously struggles to keep up with the dictation.

Some psychics believe that our deeper inspirations are culled from the 'Akashic records' or 'Book of life', wherein lies all knowledge. In certain states of mind, and in some especially sensitive people, this hidden knowledge becomes available to the human consciousness. Mrs Brown could well be one of these specially receptive people and the music she believes comes from Chopin or Beethoven may come instead from this 'pool' of musical knowledge. Because of her personal humility her conscious mind may dramatise her method of receiving the music as direct dictation from the masters.

The late Mrs Rosalind Heywood, researcher into the paranormal and author of *The sixth sense*, has another suggestion. Mrs Brown is, she guesses, 'the type of sensitive whom frustration, often artistic, drives to the automatic production of material beyond their conscious capacity.'

To those who believe in the omniscience of the human subconscious the compositions given to the world by Mrs Brown and others like her raise more questions than they answer. But it is all so beautifully simple to the mediums – there is no death and genius is eternal.

On page 390 we look at the extraordinary works of psychic or 'automatic' painters

Island of the dragon

Winding its way from east to west, a high ridge of firestone in the shape of a dragon forms the backbone of the Isle of Wight. Could this, asks BRIAN INNES, provide the vital clue to the island's many mysteries?

THE ISLE OF WIGHT is a remarkable place – both historically and geologically. A close look at its structure suggests that the central position of Gatcombe may be of great significance.

Although it is too much to expect that the mirror symmetry of the island should extend to its geology, there is nevertheless a remarkable feature about its structure. The strata of the Isle of Wight have been tilted up so that they are exposed as parallel bands of rock running east-west. If these strata had been straight and even, then the mirror image of one half of the island in the other would have been preserved. But the central ridge of the downs has been distorted so that it makes a great flattened S shape, in a band of several strata that runs from the Foreland, through Brading and Ashey Down to Carisbrooke, where it curves right round to the south-east. Then it runs through Gatcombe before curving back to the west and passes north of Mottiscombe and straight on to the downs that lead to the Needles.

The narrowest and most evenly S-shaped of these strata is a hard iron-bearing green-sand, sometimes known as firestone. The S is divided into two equal symmetrical halves that lie each side of a line that runs east and west, and this line cuts the S exactly at Gatcombe.

The similarity of the names of places that mark the symmetry of shape of the Isle of Wight is also shown in names associated with this S-shaped ridge. To the north of the

ridge, in the western half of the island, lies Apes Down; to the south, in the eastern half, is Apse Heath. Close to the westernmost point of the ridge are The Nodes; and close to the easternmost end is Nodes Point.

We will return to the meaning of Apes Down and Apse Heath later; but 'nodes' is a very strange word that needs immediate investigation. In astronomy, the nodes are the points where the apparent path of the



Above: the Needles, site of the pinnacle of Ur, are the tail of the dragon. Eastwards, the downs wind across the centre of the island, as at Mottistone (below), where the Long Stone stands

Moon crosses the ecliptic (the path of the Sun). And because of the way in which the Moon moves about the Earth, its apparent path through the ecliptic is a flat, serpentine S shape, which ancient astrologers likened to that of a dragon: the north node of the Moon is called Caput Draconis, the dragon's head, and its south node is called Cauda Draconis, the dragon's tail.

From earliest times, astrologers believed





Above: is this an English pyramid? Was man-made Silbury Hill raised by wandering Egyptians long before the great monuments were built at Giza?



that events on Earth mirrored those in the heavens. They believed in the Hermetic principle 'As above, so below', and the study of astrology led them to believe that a knowledge of the future positions of the heavenly bodies would enable them to predict happenings on Earth. And often they made conscious attempts to reflect the heavens – by, for instance, positioning sacred places in the shape of the constellations, or by celebrating feast days when a particular star was on the horizon or at the zenith. The Druids – or whoever were the first priests of the Isle of Wight – must have been overwhelmed by the discovery that the Moon's dragon path was exactly mirrored in the high ridge of the downs, and for them the island must have become a very sacred place indeed.

Their three holy sites were the pinnacle of Ur, the Long Stone at Mottistone and the oak grove of Gabhanodorum, and they all lie

Above: the central firestone stratum of the Isle of Wight ridge closely mirrors the path of the Moon as it crosses the ecliptic. At the very centre of the island, where Rue Street intersects the dragon-shaped ridge, lies the church of Gatcombe. Also of interest is the fact that a line drawn from the village of Godshill (on the western of the two great ley lines that embrace the island) and extended through Gatcombe passes directly through another Godshill

upon the dragon-shaped firestone ridge.

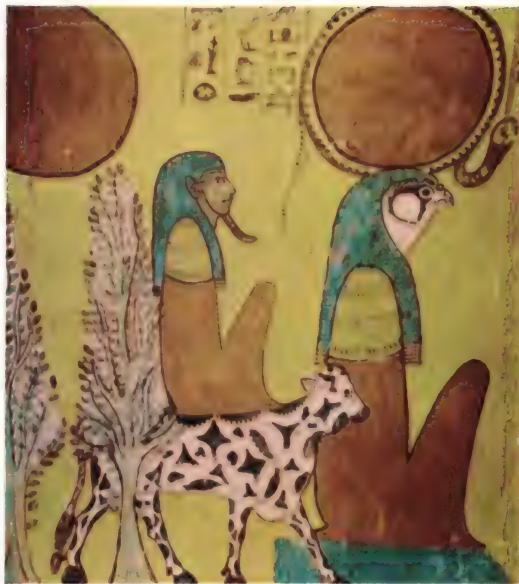
Author John Michell has shown how closely the ley lines of Britain are connected with stories of dragons: on the long ley line that runs from Lands End to Bury St Edmunds, there are many churches dedicated to St Michael – who is always represented as overcoming a dragon – and strange dragon-like motifs are to be found in many others. But in the Isle of Wight it is the dragon itself that forms the island.

And who were the first priests here? Some 50 years ago the antiquarian J. Rendel Harris proposed a remarkable theory.

The capital of the island is the town of Newport, which stands upon the river Medina. But the original name of the town itself was also Medina – and *medina* is Arabic for town. Harris began to study the names of other places on the island. Where the river Medina flows into the sea now stands the

famous yachting town of Cowes, and its most northerly extension is to Egypt Point. The name of Cowes, Harris suggested, came from the Egyptian *khau*, signifying regal dignity. And Rue Street, which runs straight toward the midday sun at the midsummer solstice, should be Ra Street, the road of the Sun God. As for the two rivers Yar; the word *yar* is the root of the name of many rivers, such as the Garonne or the Jordan, and it means 'river' or 'water' in ancient Semitic languages.

But how would Egyptians have come to the Isle of Wight? Harris proposed that successive bands, either the ancient Egyptians themselves or a race speaking a closely-related language, had made their way up the river Volga, through northern Russia, and so to Scotland, Ireland and the whole of the British Isles. But it is equally possible that they came by way of the Straits of Gibraltar

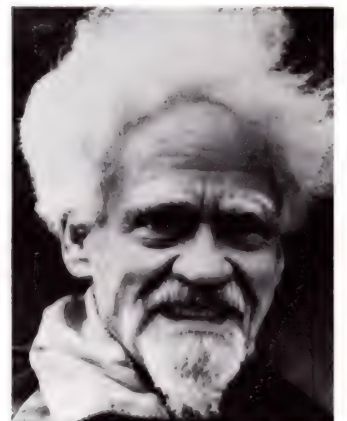


Far left: in this tomb painting from Thebes, the Sun-god Ra is represented with a falcon's head. Behind him is the bull-god Apis. Above Ra's head, the sun is encircled by the serpent Mehen



Left: the bull Apis with the sun disc between his horns: a bronze figure with silver inlay from Memphis, Egypt, centre of the bull cult

Below: two latter-day figures with an intense interest in the isle of witchcraft: John Wilkes, 18th-century rake and one of the leading members of the Hell Fire Club; and Gerald Gardner, self-proclaimed 'king' of the witches in England in the 1950s. The cap perched on Wilkes's staff symbolises revolution, but bears an uncanny resemblance to the ancient Phrygian cap



Left: in this aerial view of the Isle of Wight from the east, the blue lines indicate the serpent ridge winding its way across the island

and the Bay of Biscay, exactly as the Phoenicians were to do in later centuries.

Such a theory would help to explain how the megalithic monuments of Britain have their counterparts in France, Scandinavia, Germany, Spain, Malta, Crete – and finally, in their most sophisticated form, in the pyramids of Egypt. We know that Stonehenge was erected more than 500 years before the pyramids: perhaps Egyptian colonists learnt the arts of cutting, moving and erecting great masses of stone in Britain, and took back their knowledge to Egypt.

And this theory also supplies one small additional piece of evidence that ties up with what we know of a persisting cult of bull sacrifice on the Isle of Wight; for what are Apse Heath and Apes Down named after but Apis, the Egyptian bull god?

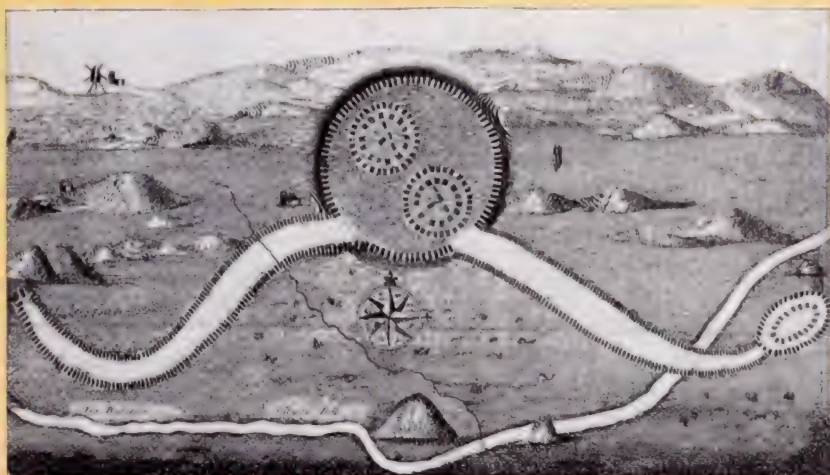
Now the pieces of the jigsaw begin to fit together. First there was the island itself,

separated from the mainland of Britain by the Solent (the gate of the Sun?); a remarkably symmetrical island, whose backbone was formed of a great dragon shape of firestone. Who knows what undiscovered veins of Earth energy run through that ridge that mirrors the Moon's path?

Then came the Egyptians, who perhaps were the first to recognise the strength of this Earth force. They had no need to build a great stone monument there, for in a sense the whole island was one. They worshipped the Sun and the bull, and the Druids carried on the practice. Later came the Romans, with their cult of Mithras, the god of light and companion of the Sun, and the sacrifice of the redeeming bull. For thousands of years the island was a temple of the Sun – possibly even the great temple of Apollo described by the Greek writer Hecateus in the fourth century BC in his *History of the Hyperboreans*.



Serpents and spirals



The dragon, wrote Sir Grafton Elliott Smith, who collected dragon myths throughout the world, 'controls the rivers or seas, dwells in pools or wells, or in the clouds on the tops of mountains, regulates the tides, the flow of streams, or the rainfall, and is associated with thunder and lightning.' In all the myths, and in most cultures to the present day, the dragon is a beneficent influence, the guardian of the powers of the Earth. Only in Christianity did the dragon, and his close relative the serpent, come to represent the forces of evil, the great adversary who was overcome by Saint Michael or Saint George.

In the earliest art, dragons and serpents were represented in one of two ways; as a spiral – the shape of the coiled and resting animal – or as a zigzag or

Above: the great stone temple at Avebury, as it was first recorded, before most of the stones were removed by farmers

Right: the Egyptian serpent Apep or Apophis

sinuous shape. The profound reverence in which ancient man held this primeval beast is evidenced in great prehistoric monuments all over the world: as spirals carved on megaliths and tombs, as coiled mazes that led to a bull or some other Sun-related symbol at their centre, or as vast structures like the serpent mound in Ohio and the writhing avenues of standing stones that originally led to and from the circle at Avebury.

Throughout Europe, early Christian churches were built over sites that had been sacred places for thousands of years. The many churches dedicated to St Michael or St George that stand on hilltops on ley lines in England, as well as the churches built close to megaliths, indicate how the connection between the dragon and the forces of the Earth was



recognised by their founders.

In Egyptian mythology the Sun-god Ra was sometimes shown protected by the coils of the serpent Mehen. This enabled him to pass untouched on his nightly journey through the realms of another serpent, Apep or Apophis.

According to Hecateus, the Hyperboreans lived on a northern island as large as Sicily (although the Isle of Wight is in fact much smaller than Sicily), which was fertile, possessed an excellent climate, and had two harvests a year.

With the departure of the Romans from the Isle of Wight the villas fell into disrepair and eventually were buried in rubble and soil. It was not until late in the 19th century that the first serious excavations were undertaken, and further archaeological work may yet show that Brading was indeed the site of a temple of Mithras.

But the practice of ancient magic persisted, though it gradually declined into witchcraft, and much of the knowledge was forgotten and lost. Yet, when John Wilkes, one of the most active members of Sir Francis Dashwood's 'Hell Fire Club', retired from London, he was very anxious to get hold of a little house on the island. And when Gerald Gardner, the 'father of modern witchcraft', met his first practising witch in

the autumn of 1939, she was a Wight woman who had just been evacuated because of the outbreak of war – but who still kept within the two ley lines that embrace the island.

Just before midday on 13 June 1831, a unique event took place on the Isle of Wight. An intense electrical storm burst over Gatcombe, where it stands at the focus of the island's dragon line, and the path of the Moon crosses the Street of the Sun. At the same time, Sun and Moon were in conjunction, where Ra Street ran southward in a straight line pointing directly to them. And at the heart of Gatcombe a piece of lodestone, a strongly magnetic rock, suddenly exploded with tremendous force.

'Under such circumstances', wrote the Rev. James Evans – to whom we are indebted for the story of Lucy Lightfoot – 'may not time itself become distorted and disorganised? May not, indeed, time become a circle in which the future and the past just chase each other, and the present goes haywire, whirling around in the other direction?'

Further reading

- Judy Allen and Jeanne Griffiths, *The book of the dragon*, Orbis 1979
- Abraham Elder, *Tales and legends of the Isle of Wight*, 1843
- Joan Forman, *The mask of time*, Macdonald and Jane's 1978
- John Michell, *The flying saucer vision*, Abacus 1974
- Charles Tompkins, *A tour to the Isle of Wight*, 1796

Trial by fire



Incombustibility was, until recently, thought of as being essentially an Eastern 'trick' – but, as FRANK SMYTH points out, Europeans can also learn the ancient art of making themselves immune to fire

SOME FIREWALKERS ARE born with the gift, some attain the gift, and some have the gift – literally – thrust upon them. But exactly how men avoid being seriously burned while walking across banked stones heated to up to 800°F (430°C), modern science has yet to explain.

Is fakery involved? In the 1890s, a New Zealand magistrate named Colonel Gudgeon, his friend Dr T. N. Hocken, and two other Europeans were determined to find out once and for all. While they were watching (rather sceptically) a demonstration of firewalking by a shaman in Raratoa, Polynesia, the shaman challenged them to accept the protection of his *mana* – or power – and try the walk themselves. Colonel Gudgeon and friends accepted the challenge, removed

Above: a spectacular exhibition of firewalking put on by 40 fanatical Brahmins in 1912 for the entertainment of their European audience. They carry sacred objects to reinforce their mood of heightened religious ecstasy, which seems to make them impervious to the incandescent pit



their shoes and socks, and made the perilous journey. According to Gudgeon's report later, one of the party, 'who, like Lot's wife, looked behind him, a thing against all the rules', was badly burned. Gudgeon himself had his doubts as he approached the pit and felt the waves of heat. 'My impression', he said, 'was that the skin would all peel off my feet'. Nevertheless all he felt when he got to the other side was 'a tingling sensation not unlike electric shock'.

When his own personal sally was successfully over, Dr Hocken began making tests. He had brought along a thermometer capable of readings up to 400°F (205°C), which he suspended six feet (two metres) above the trench. The mercury rapidly climbed the glass and would have burst, according to the doctor, if the solder had not melted first. Afterwards, he made a thorough examination of the native walkers' feet, finding them soft and pliable and in no way unduly leathery. He took scrapings for 'foreign protective substances', which proved negative, and finally licked the soles of the feet with his tongue. They were, he announced, completely free of any chemical protection, and he was of the opinion that trickery could not account for what he had seen.

Despite Dr Hocken's carefully scientific approach, his conclusions were unacceptable in some quarters. For instance, Edward Clodd, the president of the Folklore Society, poured scorn on firewalking reports in his presidential address for 1895.

'The whole thing is a trick', he declared. 'I don't pretend to know how it is done. But it is well known that the soles of people who go barefoot acquire a callosity which enables them to endure what we could hardly tolerate



An experiment at Carlshalton, England, in April 1937, proved that, even under strictly observed conditions, both Indians and Europeans could walk the fiery pit – and emerge unscathed. First over the embers was Ahmed Hussein (top) and next came Reginald Adcock (above). Both had their feet examined before and after the walk to check for any artificial protection or – afterwards – any burn-marks. Neither were found to exist. This experiment followed that of September, 1935 (also at Carlshalton) when a Moslem, Kuda Bux, was carefully watched by scientists and psychical researchers as he walked over fiery embers

in our boots.’ He went on to suggest that the feet might be ‘rendered insensible’ by treating them with diluted sulphuric acid or alum. ‘And it is well known’, he repeated, ‘that a man may hold his hand in a stream of molten iron so long as the hand is kept moist. The intense heat causes the moisture to retain its spherical form, so that there is a sort of film between the hand and the metal, rendering the heat perfectly bearable.’

Clodd’s outburst brought forth a lengthy and brilliant rebuke from Andrew Lang, one of the most prominent of late-Victorian historians and anthropologists. Mentioning reports of similar phenomena in Virgil, in books of travel, saintly legends, trials by ordeal, and so on, Lang pointed out that anthropology had ‘treasured’ such accounts:

Why she should stand aloof from analogous descriptions by . . . living witnesses, the present writer is unable to

imagine. The better, the more closely contemporary the evidence, the more a witness of the abnormal is ready to submit to cross examination, the more his testimony is apt to be neglected by Folklorists.

Of course, he went on, he was not maintaining that there was anything ‘psychical’ in firewalking or firehandling, and as far as anyone knew it might well be a trick. But:

As a trick it is so old, so world-wide, that we should ascertain the *modus* of it. Mr Clodd . . . suggests the use of diluted sulphuric acid, or of alum. But I am not aware that he has tried the experiment on his own person, nor has he produced an example in which it was successfully tried. Science demands actual experiment.

In fact, experiment continued into the next few decades. Doctors like T. N. Hocken carefully noted the effects without having an inkling as to the cause. Dr John G. Hill of

Tahiti, for instance, had examined a white man who had walked the fiery local pit. His face had peeled in the heat, but his boots, socks and feet were unmarked. Dr. B. Glanvill Corney, chief medical officer of the Fijian Islands, gave the results of an extensive survey he had made in a paper published in February 1914. He had watched five mass walks over genuinely super-heated stones, and had examined the feet of every individual taking part before and after the walk, without finding trace of trickery – or burning.

Although not conducted under rigid scientific rules, the firewalk which took place in 1921 at Madras must surely have been among the most spectacular ever recorded. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Mysore had asked his friend, the sophisticated local Maharaja, to organise a firewalk demonstration. According to the writer Oliver Leroy, the Maharaja hired a Moslem ‘fakir’ to cast a sort of mystical blanket of protection over those entering the fire. To the strains of the Maharaja’s military brass band – all of whom were Christians – the first voluntary walkers crossed the flames. The Moslem ‘fakir’ physically threw a number of unwilling participants onto the burning embers, whose looks of horror changed to astonished smiles. Finally the entire brass band were induced to make the trip and walked through, twice.

Firewalking in England

The only damper cast on the proceedings came when the Maharaja finally called a halt; the Moslem organiser screamed in agony and threw himself writhing upon the ground. It was explained to the Bishop that all potential pain had been visited upon the fakir himself.

Fourteen years later, in September 1935, an attempt was made to organise a truly scientific experiment with firewalking under the aegis of the University of London. A 24-foot (7-metre) fiery trench was prepared at Carlshalton, Surrey – its average temperature being 800°F (430°C). A young Indian Moslem named Kuda Bux strode across the length of the trench four times, and again was found to be free of any artificial protection. Despite the stringent tests made to guard against trickery, the onlookers included several diehard sceptics. Harry Price, the famous ghost hunter, rationalised that Kuda Bux was able to do the impossible because he made but brief contact with the burning wood, which anyway had low thermal conductivity. An unnamed doctor sneered to observer Harold S. W. Chibbett that ‘anyone could do it’. Invited to try, he replied that he was not suitably dressed.

In the face of the cumulative evidence, such jibes and ill-informed ‘rationalisations’ are meaningless: certain people, individually and in groups, do have a mysterious ability to walk on hot coals and handle burning embers without mechanical trickery being involved. But does the secret lie in a ‘trickery’ of the



mind – perhaps using self- or mass-hypnosis?

When Professor Stephenson undertook his 30-yard (27-metre) walk along a burning trench in Tokyo, he was prepared by a Shinto priest who took him to a temple and sprinkled salt on his head. As he walked across he felt a mild tingling in his feet – and, at one point, a sudden brief stab of pain. Later he found a slight cut on his foot, as if made by a sharp stone, which seems to indicate that the salt sprinkling ceremony protected him only from the heat, and not from *all* pain. Dr Harry B. Wright reported a similar observation after watching a firewalk at Viti Levu in Fiji. Though the walkers appeared to be in a state of ecstasy during the walk itself, they reacted sharply – and normally – when he jabbed their feet at random with a pin and a lighted cigarette before and after the ceremony. Similarly St Polycarp of Smyrna – who was martyred in about AD 155 – was sentenced to the stake, but the flames had no effect on him; finally a soldier stabbed him with a spear – and killed him.

There are several recorded instances of the officiating priest or shaman taking on the pain of the walkers himself – as in the cases of Colonel Gudgeon and the Maharaja of Mysore mentioned earlier.

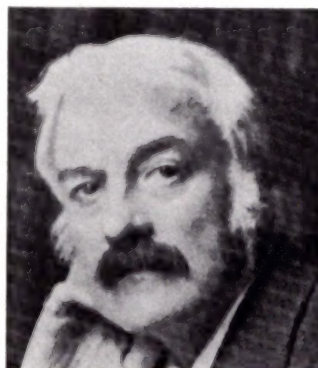
In such circumstances it would appear that the officiant is able to hypnotise – or literally entrance – his followers: if the spell wears off or faith wavers, the fire resumes its power to burn.

Many of the North American Indian rituals involve preparations of dancing, chanting and either feasting or abstinence. Hindus, Buddhists and followers of Shinto call upon their gods, saints, and ancestors. Every year on the feast days of St Constantine and St Helena, Greek villagers of Langadas perform a firewalk over hot coals while holding icons of the two saints aloft, thus ensuring themselves protection. In these cases a form of self-hypnosis seems to

Above: though a stage act, the fire immunity is real



Opponents – Edward Clodd, (above) thought firewalking an easy trick; Andrew Lang (below) wanted Clodd to prove his theory personally but Clodd refused to try



Further reading

John Michell & Robert J. M. Rickard, *Phenomena – A book of wonders*, Thames and Hudson 1977
Robert Rickard & Richard Kelly, *Photographs of the unknown*, New English Library 1980

play a major role. Certainly the accounts of D. D. Home making ‘passes’ with his hands before handing onlookers red-hot coals to hold smacks of the ‘hypnotic passes’ of stage mesmerists.

But the boots burned off . . .

That there could be substance in the ‘natural ability’ explanation of fire immunity is borne out by John Evelyn’s description of Richardson, the fire-eater, who made no claim to magical or spiritual powers – but could quite simply eat fire. Into this category comes the account, by Max Freedom Long, of a fair-ground fire-eater who impressed him in the 1940s. The writer fixed up a private performance to which he invited a dentist. The fire-eater played ‘the hottest flame of a welding torch over the inside of his mouth, keeping his jaws wide open to allow close inspection’. He also heated a rod of metal until it was flexible and bent it between his teeth. Both Long and the dentist believed that the phenomenon was authentic.

But the sceptic’s biggest stumbling block is not the immunity of the fire handler himself, but that of his clothes. A state of trance hypnosis may well protect a person’s skin, but how does one hypnotise a pair of socks and shoes? The fully clad brass band of the Maharaja of Mysore walked through their flames and came out as smartly uniformed as when they went in; the saffron robes of Buddhist fire dancers in Hong Kong remain cool, dry and totally uncharred. And long before that, St Catherine of Sienna regularly went into ecstatic trances and lay for hours across the kitchen fire. The wonder was not so much that she remained unincinerated but that her clothes did. Even odder was the selectivity of the fire towards the Jansenist hysteric Marie Souet: while lying over a blazing hearth, she and the sheet which wrapped her went unburned though her stockings and shoes burned quite normally.

Dr W. T. Brigham of the British Museum consented to go on a firewalk on the volcanic island of Kona in the South Seas. It was a walk with a difference, for the volcano had just erupted, and his protectors, three Kahunas or local magicians, proposed that he should stroll with them across the glowing, molten lava. First, they suggested, he should take off his boots, as they would not be covered by the magical protection. The professor hesitated, and finally the magicians pulled him onto the lava with them. He was forced to walk across 50 yards (46 metres), while the three magicians laughed heartily at the glowing scraps left behind as his boots and socks burned off. His feet – and the rest of his clothes – were completely unharmed.

After his Fiji experiments, Dr Glanvill Corney reported that neither psychical nor psychological theories alone can account for what happens in the case of fire immunity, and that some physical phenomenon takes place which is yet to be explained.

Post script

Your letters to
THE UNEXPLAINED

Dear Sir,

You may be interested to know of a strange event that happened lately. My son takes *The Unexplained* and one afternoon he gave it to me to look through, open at page 23. I asked him to fetch my glasses, as I cannot read print without them; as he was fetching them, I happened to glance at the page. I immediately recognised one of the pictures as the face that came into my mind when I very first read of the disappearance of Genette Tate. It was the same face, and in my vision he was wearing mechanics' overalls and leaning out of a car window. My son was utterly amazed when I told him – and so was I when he read me the caption beside the picture. It said that the picture was an artist's impression of the killer of Genette Tate, produced from descriptions a mother and daughter had given under hypnosis. I had not the least notion of what was written on the page when I first saw the face. This is my first experience of this kind.

Yours faithfully,
E. Thompson (Mrs)

Gillingham, Kent

Dear Sir,

My ESP experiences started at the age of five years, when I correctly described countryside before I saw it for the first time while on holiday in Norfolk. My parents were stunned – and didn't mention the incident until years later.

However, my first real experience of premonition occurred in June 1962. I had just given birth to my fourth child and was spending a weekend alone at home. On either the Friday or the Saturday night I had a very vivid dream.

I dreamt I was talking to my cousin Margaret, then 17 years old; she was married, with a son of 11 months, and in the dream she told me she was expecting another baby. While she was telling me this her whole body shook with the most heartrending sobs, and I could feel her anguish in my own heart. Then, amid the sobs, we had the following conversation:

'Why are you crying, dear, 'I asked.

'It's the sorrow, just the sorrow, I can't stand the sorrow.'

'Didn't you want the baby?'

'Yes, of course I want it, but oh God, it's the sorrow!'

'What does Barry [Margaret's husband] think?'

'He's thrilled, but we can't stand the pain and the sorrow.'

That was where the dream ended. When I awoke, I was unsure of the meaning of the dream, and in fact I did not know whether my cousin was pregnant.

Soon afterwards I heard that she was in fact pregnant. I was rather worried, but told no one. Margaret had a son in February 1963 and called him Tony. I saw him only once: I think it was in the June of that year when Margaret and her husband were packing up their belongings to go and live abroad. After I had seen that Tony was obviously a very healthy child, my mind was put at rest and I never really thought of him again until, in 1964, I heard that he had been drowned in the sea.

I do not believe I could have prevented this tragic

accident from occurring. I don't know why I dreamt the dream, or felt the feeling. I must say my life is full of such things – most of them too trivial to mention. I have long since learned to live with these things.

Incidentally, I knew the sex of each of my five children before they were born. My stepdaughter and my eldest daughter both had twin sons, and I knew from the start that they would have twins – long before the doctors or anyone else suggested they would.

Yours faithfully,
Ella Nurse (Mrs)

King's Lynn, Norfolk

Dear Sir,

I should like to tell you about a premonition I had some three years ago.

My aunt and uncle, who have no children of their own, always treated me like their son. One Saturday morning I awoke, having had a dream of being in my aunt's garden and standing outside a store shed that was stacked with tins of paint. I was standing looking at the paint and saying to my aunt, 'Don't worry about buying paint and decorating, I will do that for you now that Uncle Arthur's gone.' The shed in my dream was full of tins of paint, although in real life it was used as an outside coalshed.

I told my wife of my dream on the Saturday morning, then forgot all about it until the telephone rang on Sunday evening.

It was my aunt's next door neighbour, who was ringing to say that my uncle had dropped dead on Sunday afternoon and that my aunt had been taken to hospital, suffering from shock. I later collected my aunt from hospital and she came to stay with my family for a while. After about a week I took her back to her own house to collect some of her things. She took me out into the garden to show me where my uncle had fallen when he died, and I was amazed to see that it was the exact spot where I had been standing in my dream – outside the coal store.

Yours faithfully,
D. B. Miller

Margaretting, Essex

Dear Sir,

I wonder if any of your readers can cast any light on an explosion in the Berwyn Mountains in Wales.

This occurred on the night of 6 August 1976 and woke people over about a 10-mile [16-kilometre] radius. It was heard in Bala, Corwen, Glyn-Ceiriog and Mangynog.

The moors were scoured by the police and afterwards Liverpool University took up the investigation. No crater or any other trace of an explosion was found, and local gossip has it that they concluded that it was a black hole that had done the damage!

A friend of mine then living at Glyn-Ceiriog was wakened by the explosion and thought a lorry had been in collision. He went out and saw horizontal lights crossing the sky. He alerted the local police force, but they found nothing unusual.

I really would be most interested to know if any of your readers heard the same explosion.

Yours faithfully,
R. C. B. Jones

Chester, Cheshire

THE WORLD'S MYSTERIOUS PLACES-15
Nemrud Dag, Turkey

